

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2002

Contact: Steve Capps

(916) 651-8750

MAJOR RESTORATION PROJECT BEGINS AT WILL ROGERS STATE PARK

PACIFIC PALISADES – California State Parks has launched a \$5.3-million renovation effort at Will Rogers State Historic Park, including major work at the 31-room ranch house, stables, blacksmith shop and hay barn, and restoration of the flagstone patio and walkway surrounding the main house.

While the ranch house is closed during the renovation, the remainder of the park will be open, including the stable and corral areas, riding ring, roping arena, polo field and riding and hiking trails that offer visitors spectacular views of the region. It is anticipated the home will reopen to public tours in late 2004.

“We are excited about the project and think the many fans of this wonderful man and his ranch will be too,” said Ruth Coleman, Acting Director of California State Parks. “Restoration of this beautiful park is a high priority for State Parks.”

The ranch house project includes re-roofing, seismic safety work, replacement of electrical systems, installation of a new heating and air conditioning system. It also includes weatherizing improvements to door openings and windows to conserve energy and to protect existing artifacts.

The project also includes extensive work at the historic stable, a three-part structure that includes a striking central rotunda. The stalls feature thick Dutch doors. Damaged wood in the stalls will be repaired or replaced, a drainage system will be developed to divert water away from the stable and gutters and downspouts will be replaced.

Renovation of the historic hay barn also is part of the current project. That includes shoring of sagging roof structures, structural repairs of deteriorated lumber and shoring of retaining walls. The historic blacksmith shop will be restored to provide for an interpretive building, helping to illustrate for visitors the use of the facilities when Will Rogers and his family lived there.

(more)

The ranch buildings and grounds are maintained as they were when the Rogers family lived there in the late 1920s and 1930s. The living room of the main ranch house, with a collection of Indian rugs and baskets, features a porch swing in the center of the room and a mounted calf, which was given to Will Rogers to encourage him to rope the calf instead of his friends. The north wing of the house contains the family bedrooms, the study, and the sunroom.

The park also includes trails that lead to spectacular views of the countryside around the park. Since Will Rogers State Historic Park is on the tip of the Santa Monica Mountains, the trails offer vistas of both the sea and the mountains. Visitors can hike to Inspiration Point or take the Rogers trail around the perimeter of the park.

Will Rogers was a beloved American humorist whose career in vaudeville took him to Broadway and the Ziegfeld Follies, and then on to Hollywood for movies, his own newspaper column, and radio show.

Unlike many other people in Hollywood, he was a cowboy. He was a professional rodeo performer and trick roper. His ranch reflects his roots in horsemanship, starting with the polo field. Featured in many movies and TV shows, the polo field is still used for games today.

In what is now the town of Pacific Palisades, Rogers built his ranch, where he lived with his wife Betty and their three children, Will, Jr., Mary, and James. Will Rogers was killed in a plane crash in 1935, and his 186-acre ranch became a State Park in 1944 after the death of Mrs. Rogers. It was reclassified as a Historic Park in 1963.

The 273-unit California State Parks system includes 47 historic parks, which are established to preserve places and objects of statewide historic significance.

#